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Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Security Council considers measures to enhance arrangements for consultations and exchange of information with troop contributors.

- UNPROFOR transfers military responsibility in Bosnia to IFOR; Special Envoy Annan says achievements of United Nations operation must not be forgotten.

- Secretary-General welcomes cease-fire between Yemen and Eritrea and calls for restraint; reiterates willingness to offer good offices to end dispute over Hanish Island.

- General Assembly calls on States to put end to conflict in Afghanistan and to stop arms flows to all parties.

- Implementation of Abuja Agreement is behind schedule and further delays in Liberian peace process must be avoided, Secretary-General says.

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The Security Council met today to examine the issue of consultations between it and troop-contributing countries. The Council was meeting in response to a letter signed by 34 States. The letter noted that a mechanism had been implemented earlier in the year to allow consultations among Council members, troop contributors and the Secretariat. It requested that the Council consider further measures to enhance arrangements for consultations and exchange of information with troop contributors.

Speakers stressed the need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Security Council's consultations with troop-contributing countries. They pointed out that peace-keeping operations could not exist without contributors. The Council acted on behalf of the Member States and should thus draw on their views when establishing an operation.

The Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation supported a flexible and pragmatic approach to strengthening the mechanism of consultations. The most important thing was not formalizing meetings as an

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end in itself, but taking into account the views of all concerned. He favoured the timely involvement of contributors before the Council took action on peace-keeping operations.

The Permanent Representative of Egypt proposed that the Security Council adopt a decision to regularize consultations with troop-contributing countries. Those consultations should be held well before the Council decided on any peace-keeping mandates, to allow delegations to inform their governments of all options available and to receive instructions.

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The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) today handed over military responsibility in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led Implementation Force (IFOR). The transfer took place in a ceremony at Sarajevo airport, after a short delay caused by bad weather. IFOR's main task is to support implementation of the Bosnian Peace Agreement, which was signed last week in Paris.

UNPROFOR was represented at today's ceremony by the Commander of the United Nations Peace Forces (UNPF), Lieutenant-General Bernard Janvier, while IFOR was represented by NATO's Commander-in-Chief of Allied Forces Southern Europe, Admiral Leighton Smith. The United Nations was represented by Kofi Annan, Special Envoy to the former Yugoslavia and to NATO.

In his address, Mr. Annan said all had shared the pain of a brutal and brutalizing war, although the people of the region had paid the highest price. However, it was important to remember the moral anguish of the peace-keepers who had witnessed atrocities and who had had neither the orders nor the ordnance to stop them. It was also necessary to remember the 110 peace-keepers who had died and the 800 who had been injured.

Timing and political will were essential to the success of peace-keeping operations, Mr. Annan continued. Peace-keeping did not exist in a vacuum -- it must go hand in hand with peacemaking and must at times yield to peace enforcement. The achievements of the United Nations operation should not be forgotten -- it had supported vital humanitarian efforts, mediated tirelessly between the parties and made possible the longest-running airlift in aviation history.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali met today with the Permanent Representative of Yemen, Abdallah Saleh Al-Ashtal. They discussed preparations for the Secretary-General's forthcoming visit to Yemen, which was planned for some time ago.

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Mr. Al-Ashtal briefed the Secretary-General on the latest developments in the conflict between Yemen and Eritrea over Hanish Island. The Council of Ministers in Sana'a had just issued a communique which made three demands: the release of all Yemeni prisoners of war; the total withdrawal of Yemeni forces from the island; and negotiations to delineate the maritime border between the two countries. Meanwhile, the Government of Yemen would welcome any good offices initiative by the Secretary-General aimed at settling the conflict peacefully.

The Secretary-General welcomed the cease-fire and called on the parties to exercise restraint. He reiterated his willingness to offer his good offices with a view to finding a peaceful resolution to the dispute.

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The General Assembly has called on States to promote peace in Afghanistan, to stop the flow of arms to all parties and to put an end to the destructive conflict in that country. It took that action yesterday, by adopting a two-part resolution on the situation in Afghanistan without a vote.

The Assembly called on all States to respect Afghanistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to refrain from interfering in its internal affairs. It called on all warring parties in Afghanistan to refrain from detaining foreign nationals, and urgently appealed to them to strictly respect all provisions of international humanitarian law. The Assembly further called on the parties not to hinder efforts to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the Afghan population.

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Implementation of the Abuja Agreement is behind schedule and every effort must be made to avoid further delays in the Liberian peace process, according to the Secretary-General. In a report to the Security Council dated 18 December, he said critical aspects of the Agreement -- disarmament and demobilization -- were not likely to begin before January. While that was a cause for concern, the delay should be seen in the context of the implementation timetable, which might have underestimated the delays involved in deploying the necessary personnel and equipment.

The Secretary-General stressed that the Liberian factions must cooperate fully in implementing the Abuja Agreement. The first step in that process was the complete disengagement of forces. He urged the Liberian leaders to continue to demonstrate their commitment to the peace process by ensuring respect for the cease-fire and the timely implementation of the Agreement, especially disarmament and demobilization. He added that he would report on progress made in that regarded before the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) expired on 31 January.

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